

Church at home for Mothering Sunday

This is week one of not being able to gather, so here is a simple reminder – church is us, the people, not our building. We are church today as scattered people, just as much as if we were gathered together. Each week I will try to prepare some materials (ideas of songs to sing or listen to on CD or online using you tube or similar, prayer pointers and a reflection on our planned Bible passage) that you can use at home on Sunday to be ‘church at home’. The deacons and I are working out how we can print copies off for those without computers and safely deliver them. That may take a week or two. So, if you know someone from Green Lane who doesn’t have access to the material, or you know someone likely to be sad or scared at home without a chance to meet, why not give them a ring to chat, encourage and offer prayer?

It’s very easy to be distracted at home – the dish washer needs emptying, the washing needs sorting, there’s a pile of ironing, other people! Perhaps to help you focus, you could light a candle to show you are setting aside time to be with God in a distinct way, or find some other way to mark this set aside time as special. It may be that this material doesn’t suit you. In that case I encourage you to listen out for the Sunday service that the BBC will be broadcasting on BBCWM (found at 95.6 on the MW dial) (times not available yet), the service they will broadcast on BBC1 (time not available yet) or Songs of Praise at 1:15 on BBC1. There is encouragement in knowing you are not alone in your worship! If you do have a computer or smart phone and internet access, the Baptist Union is holding regular live prayer events. One is scheduled for Sunday at 7pm. There is also a national suggestion that people praying at home might put a candle in their window at seven, to show lights in the street and offer hope to those stumbling in darkness.

This week, then:

Songs you might sing/listen to: Thank You Lord for this new day, Oceans (You call me out upon the water), Trust and Obey, How deep the Father’s love for us

Things you might pray about: for vulnerable friends and neighbours (which may include you!), for generosity rather than greed for people going shopping, for health workers and scientists seeking to care for and treat those who are sick, for teachers who will still be teaching but also taking on all kinds of social work roles for which they are not trained, for world leaders to be wise and people to heed the advice they are given, for mums at home to be patient when their kids are driving them mad!

Things you might praise God for: that there is enough of everything if we share, that we are able to care for each other, that He never leaves or abandons us, that we are surrounded by a beautiful creation that we can enjoy, that we have a hope and love that are stronger than death, for the love of our mothers, whether they are still with us or not.

You might want to pray the Lord’s Prayer and focus on what each phrase might mean for us and our neighbours today.

Bible Reading – Isaiah 28

This chapter, like chapter 27, is very mixed. I’m going to focus on the broad picture, rather than the specifics, to see how it relates to us today.

World leaders and governments are all temporary. We look forward to the day when God himself will be our King and have a crown that will never fade. However, even our temporary leaders have standards to live up to. The leaders of Israel and Judah sadly failed miserably at doing their job; the

main problem was that they refused to hear God's word and respond to it. Paul told his Roman readers to submit to the worldly authorities, unless to do so would break God's law. For all their failings (perhaps the same as the leaders of Israel and Judah), we too must obey our government. That means finding new ways to love our neighbours and ourselves in this time of physically distancing ourselves from one another.

Religious leaders are also fallible, though few, fortunately, take the drunken approach of the priests and prophets Isaiah condemns. The people of Israel and Judah had no examples to follow; their religious leaders abdicated the task of being shepherds. I, like every other minister you know, am not perfect. I hope, though, you will be patient as the deacons and I work out how we can be good shepherds in this difficult time. Hopefully, you all have our numbers so you can ring when you need to talk or someone to pray with. Hopefully, we will be able to engage in 'doorstop' visits and chat through the door if you need more than a phone call but need to be isolating rather than just distancing.

BUT, in this time of difficulty and fear, we have a secure foundation! We have a hope that does not fade or fail. The Father has laid the foundation stone in Zion. Jesus has come to replace the temple of stone with a temple of living flesh – us! It is on him we depend and it is him that holds us together, firm and true. No matter what happens in the world, no matter even if we get sick, actually, no matter even if we should die, even then we are safe and secure in God. So, stay firm in your faith, hold on to God, take time to pray and meditate. Feed your soul as much as you usually feed your body.

The end of the chapter gives us all comfort. In different seasons, farmers do different things. For different crops, farmers use different tools. They have a wisdom that has come from God. We are in a different season, it's right to do things slightly differently, even as we keep on seeking to show the fruit of the Spirit. For those at home with children, especially the mums, use your God given wisdom to deal with each child as they need you to. You can help them grow in love, in faith and in hope. We recognise how vital your input is to your children and we thank you for it. For those of us who care for others, we too need to wait and work out in this new season, what is the right thing to do, and what is the right way to do it. May God give us all patience to wait on Him and then to obey the prompting of the Spirit.

Reflect on the grace God offers us in our frailty and fallibility and how this might shape the grace you offer to others in this difficult time.

You might want to close your time of worship by saying the grace, imagining all those up and down this country and around the world who today will pray the same prayer:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore, Amen.